

**Trinational Planning for COCAL-North America:  
Time for a Central Coordinator and Trinational Effort to Support Locals?**

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Time for a Central Coordinator and Trinational Effort to Support Locals?**

*“The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) is a floating conference and a network of North American activists working to improve higher education through the collective achievement of job security, livable wages, academic freedom, and time and resources for academic research and professional development for contingent academic laborers. COCAL promotes grassroots contingent faculty organizing through events like Campus Equity Week but is not affiliated with any single labor union. To achieve its aims, COCAL dedicates itself to alerting the broader community about the trends to undermine the tenets of higher education by staging media events, improving legislation governing funding and so-called accountability efforts, and identifying colleagues at institutions and assisting them in forming collective bargaining units and winning strong contracts” (description from COCAL VI conference website; [www.chicagococal.org/index-cocal6.html](http://www.chicagococal.org/index-cocal6.html)).*

COCAL-North America is one of just a few trinational North American entities devoted solely to contingent faculty. More than any other union or organization, it is committed to creating a social movement (not just a union or faculty senate or publication or website) on behalf of faculty-worker control, organizing and advocating for contingents across the continent, and empowering them collectively. A key component of COCAL’s success has been its institutional autonomy and its freedom from concerns that divide the interests and divert the attentions of associations and unions that also represent tenure faculty, or are multi-sector unions, or are education organizations that ignore the laboring aspects of the profession. COCAL has maintained this autonomy, although not without struggles and funding difficulties, while building the movement through the following activities: six North American conferences over ten years; the organizational and personal networking that occurred among those on the conference steering committees; the involvement in coordinating and assisting local, regional, national, and international activities such as Campus Equity Week/Fair Employment Week (CEW/FEW) in 2000

and 2003; and through the creation of local COCAL's in Boston, California and Chicago (and the one emerging in New York).

This has given COCAL sizable importance among a geographically and institutionally diverse group of contingent faculty. However, there are still many geographic areas, demographic groups, and college and university systems that are either underrepresented or entirely unconnected to COCAL. This raises questions of how to strengthen COCAL where it already exists, how to expand it to areas in which it is absent, and how to fund this without jeopardizing COCAL's autonomy. So, what can COCAL do between conferences (from August 2004-2006) to become a stronger advocate, a more strategic planner, and a more effective organizer for contingent faculty? The following is a draft of some suggestions that arose from conversations, conference calls, and a meeting of the Campus Action Group at the NAFFE (North American Alliance for Fair Employment) members meeting in Toronto in June 2004. The purpose of this paper is to circulate these suggestions, generate discussion of priorities, and mobilize COCAL behind a focused plan. What follows is intended as a conceptual step toward developing a plan, rather than being a finalized proposal. It includes a resolution (on the final page) to be discussed and revised at COCAL VI during the NAFFE meeting Friday August 6 and the National Strategy Workshop Saturday August 7; if supported, it would probably be put to a vote on Sunday.

### **COCAL Plan for August 2004-October 2006**

1. Create, select and fund a North America coordinator position (August 2004-February, 2005, so coordinator can be working full time by mid-2005).
2. Support creation of local COCALs where there is interest: New York, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec seem most ready. Are others close?
3. Assist COCAL activists in distress (there is much concern about burnout). As a direct and individualist response, how can COCAL assist specific activists? And, as a structural response, how can it help spread the work among more activists and develop next generations?

4. Consider holding COCAL VII during CEW/FEW 2006, and give COCAL a big presence, bringing continental resources and personnel to one locale, possibly generating media publicity and legislative considerations.
5. Assure that COCAL activities are not just events, but are also structure-building.

#### **I A North America coordinator position.**

Regarding the North America coordinator position, the Campus Action Group (CAG) that met in Toronto in June 2004 composed a list of functions a coordinator might fulfill. I have organized these in a possible priority ranking, as follows:

1. Serve as liaison from conference to conference of COCAL.
2. Monitor the conditions of contingent faculty and the movement across North America.
3. Use the information gathered from this monitoring to assist local COCALs.
4. Use the information gathered from this monitoring to assist unionizing efforts.
5. Create and maintain a website for this information.
6. Conduct fundraising to solidify and expand the coordinator's position (and beyond that to assist the North American COCAL Conference and local COCALs).
7. Convene conference calls for an ongoing COCAL advisory committee.
8. Identify and mentor future leaders.
9. Create an archive for compiling and publicizing international standards and conditions of contingent faculty.
10. Serve as COCAL liaison to NAFFE (if no one else steps forward).
11. Serve as CAG liaison to NAFFE (if no one else steps forward).

Doing all of this, or even a large part, would require a full-time coordinator. The CAG that met in Toronto estimated that a full-time position would need at least a \$60,000 salary. There would be additional expenses for office, materials, travel, and communications, perhaps adding another \$10,000,

for a total budget of \$70,000. The CAG also suggested the possibility of a coordinator for the U.S. and a coordinator for Canada, either in a couple of years or for each to be half time positions. If only partial funding were available, COCAL would need to prioritize and reduce the coordinator's functions. Such a coordinator would also need to report to some form of advisory committee, probably comprised of individuals who have served on COCAL conference advisory committees.

## **II Local COCALs**

In addition to having an international coordinator, COCAL's sustainability will be enhanced and its effectiveness increased if we can expand the network of local COCALs. The trinationals conferences every two years are excellent for bringing together many of those who are activist-leaders, providing an opportunity for collective conversations that are difficult to conduct other than face-to-face. At these conferences many of us learn things about contingent conditions, tactics, and goals that we would not learn merely through phone conversations, occasional meetings outside COCAL, accessing websites, or reading publications. We also learn better just what personal, social, and informational resources we can offer and receive from others, and we each learn who can best provide these for each of us. The conferences are also useful for developing trinationally coordinated activities such as CEW/FEW. In between these conferences, we apply what we have learned, accomplish our work more effectively, and build stronger relationships with a few (5-10?) of the people we meet at the conferences.

However, there is a lot of possibility for all this to be stronger than it is during the interim years between conferences. One way this can happen is through the creation of local/regional COCALs and the establishment of a genuine network of these locals. This network could then engage in the following activities to strengthen COCAL on the ground so local resources and personnel could contribute even more to the trinational movement:

1. Convene local/regional conferences, as was done by COCAL-California and through CEW/FEW 2003.
2. Learn more about one another's unions, associations, and organizations by attending their meetings and conferences as "solidarity guests."

3. Coordinate strategies across higher education systems and institutions in a given locale.
4. Develop and promote legislative strategies and political agendas that extend beyond one's own institution.
5. Participate in one another's actions to increase turnout numbers and reduce the need to bring members from greater distances (often at sizable expense), while also expanding the range of voices/organizations supporting a given action.
6. Create local/regional information sharing that would be more accessible and more complete for local purposes, e.g. on local websites.

Besides the value of each of these functions, local COCALs are probably the most effective way to identify and develop additional COCAL activists. This is vital for reproducing ourselves in succeeding generations and for reducing the work each of us must do to sustain the movement. It is much easier, less time consuming, and less costly for individuals to participate in local COCALs, therefore we can draw many more individuals into the movement through locals than we can solely through national and trinational efforts. COCAL-California is a good example of the value of a local, even if it is a huge regional local. COCAL-California, through a statewide summit and about ten events annually, has had probably ten times as many individuals participate in local activities compared to the number that attend the trinational conferences every other year. For example, COCAL California's May 2004 Summit in Berkeley drew 53 attendees, of whom about ten had attended a national COCAL conference.

Local COCALs also have some capacity for drawing additional resources out of unions, beyond those committed to the trinational conferences. The California Faculty Association, for example, has contributed to COCAL-California during years in which there was no trinational conference, and it has provided thousands of dollars in staff assistance for events like CEW/FEW.

There are several key questions for us to consider in developing a genuine network of locals: Where are there local COCALs presently, and what is their status? Who is in a position to create a local

at COCAL VI in Chicago? Who has already established the relationships that can be the basis for creating a local in a year or two? How do you create a local?

To date, three locals have been created: Boston in April 1999, Chicago in November 2001, and California in October 2002 at the COCAL V conference in Montreal. I will withhold comment on COCAL Boston because I have heard mixed reports on its current status and would prefer those from Boston report as they consider appropriate. COCAL Chicago seems to be well established with its hosting of COCAL VI, which is probably solidifying the relationships that will make it an even more active, cohesive, and effective local. And just as COCAL V did for the Montreal and Quebec activists, and COCAL IV did for the California community colleges and California State Universities, COCAL VI is probably teaching those in Chicago who they can work with, how they can work together, and what the possibilities (and limits) are. COCAL-Chicago also has a very strong web presence, with well organized resources and links for contingent faculty.

COCAL-California, during its two years of existence, has been very active in a variety of ways, and it may be a model for other locals who are already well developed. This statewide coalition consists of activists from several community colleges and the California Faculty Association (which represents the 23 California State University campuses), along with a couple of people from the University of California. COCAL-California has a “solidarity guest” program through which dozens of members have attended meetings and conferences of unions and associations other than their own. For example, representatives from the California Faculty Association (in the CSU) have attended meetings of the California Part-Time Faculty Association (part of the California Community Colleges), and the California Faculty Association has invited activists from the community colleges and University of California to speak at meetings of its statewide Lecturers Council. COCAL-California has convened about 15 of its own meetings, often adding them to the program for meetings convened by one of the coalition’s unions or associations (this is a good way to save transportation and lodging costs, especially if these are being covered by one of the unions or associations). COCAL-California’s May 2003 statewide summit had representatives from all three systems of public higher education, including approximately 10 CFA

chapters, 10 community college unions or associations, and 3 University of California campuses. During Campus Equity Week/Fair Employment Week 2003, the coalition convened three regional summits that gave faculty, students, community leaders, and business leaders an opportunity to provide testimonial to state legislators about the importance of protecting higher education and about the social, educational, and labor problems created by the ever-increasing exploitation of contingent faculty. These regional hearings were held in San Jose, Los Angeles, and San Diego, making them genuinely statewide, and they attracted contingent faculty from at least 40 different campuses. To expand its communications capacity, COCAL-California has also created a website for sharing information, resources, and announcements. On the political front, the coalition has sent contingents of contingents to lobby at the annual state conventions of the Democrat and Republican parties, which has proved particularly valuable in later budget battles at the state level. Finally, COCAL-California has official bi-laws and has established legal status as a 403C non-profit organization for tax purposes (individuals needing information on how to do this should speak to Mary Ellen Goodwin, Sandy Baringer, or Steve Wilson).

I have heard from several people that New York is very close to establishing the fourth local COCAL, and perhaps is already functioning as one informally. I would imagine that COCALs could be created without a whole lot of work in Quebec/Montreal and in British Columbia. And Ontario? (Note: in response to an earlier draft of this paper, I was informed that the conditions are a bit different in much of Canada, where the creation of local COCALs may be redundant given the existence of stronger, more cohesive, and more inclusive unions representing contingent faculty. It would be useful to hear from activists in any part of North America who believe local COCALs would require more effort than they are worth, either due to functional overlap with existing organizations or perhaps due to lack of resources or other drawbacks.)

Are any of these regions ready and interested in creating a local COCAL or holding a meeting to determine this? The Sunday August 8 timeslot for “Caucuses by Region” is designated for such a purpose. Members of the COCAL VI Advisory Committee, along with those who have experience

creating locals in Boston, California, and Chicago will probably be available to provide assistance or attend a meeting if requested.

What do local activists need to do to move toward establishing their own COCALs? How can COCAL North America assist? The first step is for local activists to meet with others from their local area and assess the existing relationships. Some people can do this at COCAL VI in Chicago; others might be able to use that weekend to schedule an exploratory meeting. At such a meeting, consider taking the following steps to move forward:

1. Exchange contact information;
2. Identify institutions, unions, and organizations that should be involved in a local COCAL;
3. Identify institutions, unions, and organizations that are now ready to be involved;
4. Identify leaders/liaisons from each institution, union and organization, and perhaps identify official representatives.

It might be wise to discuss the structure and membership in the local but hold off on formalizing it until a second or third meeting when more individuals and entities can be involved. The first meeting should be able to generate a valuable discussion of existing work conditions, bargaining arrangements, common interests and obstacles, means of collaborating, and forms of resources available. Through this discussion, the local members will get to know one another better and become more committed to a second meeting. Absolutely take it one meeting at a time—this is and should be a very fluid process.

### **III Four Additional Issues of Concern**

I am closing the paper by identifying four additional issues that have been raised by COCAL and/or Campus Action Group activists. I am mentioning them so they can be included in our discussions, although I do not have strong arguments regarding them.

**A. Assisting COCAL activists in distress**

There is much concern about burnout. As a direct and individualist response, how can COCAL assist specific activists? And, as a structural response, how can it help spread the work among more activists and develop next generations?

**B. Holding COCAL VII during CEW/FEW 2006**

This would be an opportunity to give COCAL a big presence, bringing continental resources and personnel to one locale, possibly generating media publicity and legislative considerations.

**C. Assure that COCAL activities are not just events, but are also structure-building and enduring in ways that keep the movement growing and becoming increasingly effective.**

I believe COCAL has been effective at this, and that every conference has taken a step further along this path. However, some participants, and perhaps a large number, believe the pace and strength of COCAL activities, networks, conferences, and other connections should be greater.

**D. Clarify the relationship between COCAL and NAFFE's Campus Action Group.**

There has been sizable overlap in membership among COCAL Advisory Committees and NAFFE's Campus Action Group (CAG), mainly because many of the same individuals have volunteered to serve in both capacities. However, this has raised some confusion about which group is doing what, how the two relate to one another, what their roles are regarding Campus Equity Week/Fair Employment Week. This also ties in to issues of the focus and purpose of COCAL: Is it an ongoing coalition? A floating series of conferences? Both? Something more?

Looking forward to COCAL VI in Chicago.

Craig Flanery

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## **COCAL RESOLUTION TO FUND NORTH AMERICA COORDINATOR**

**(draft)**

**Whereas** the Coalition on Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) has successfully built a trinational movement on behalf of contingent faculty through a floating series of conferences and the creation of three local COCALs, and

**Whereas** COCAL has accomplished this with merely ad hoc advisory committees and no permanent coordinator(s), and

**Whereas** COCAL seeks to expand to additional regions, institutions, and faculty in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and

**Whereas** COCAL seeks to develop stronger local and regional strategies and locals to take COCAL deeper into its base of contingent faculty,

**Be it resolved** that the COCAL VI Conference supports solidifying these efforts and increasing the coalition's stability and effectiveness through the creation and funding of a full-time COCAL-North America coordinator, to be overseen and advised by a committee drawn from the COCAL VI advisory Committee and their organizations, and

**Be it resolved** that conference participants will commit to assist in this effort by seeking funding from their unions, associations, general affiliations, and other possible funding sources such as foundations and granting agencies, and

**Be it resolved** that this effort will be accomplished in a way that does not jeopardize COCAL's autonomy and its commitment first and foremost to contingent (temporary and/or part-time) faculty.